

Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

America in the Bull's Eye: Crises in Cuba

- Standard: I. Culture
 II. Time, Continuity, and Change
 III. People, Places, and Environments
 IV. Individual Development and Identity
 V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
 VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
 VIII. Science, Technology, and Society
 IX. Global Connections
 X. Civic Ideals and Practices
- Grade Level: 9–12 (map analysis, advanced organizers, synthesis)
- Objectives: The student will:
- Share and add to their prior knowledge about the Bay of Pigs
 - Recognize the international leadership involved in the crises over Cuba
 - Discuss Kennedy's intentions in his speech to newspaper editors
 - Determine the threat to the U.S. mainland of missiles in Cuba
- Time: 2 class periods
- Materials: Documents: **1961** *The Lesson of Cuba*
 1962 *Unmistakable Evidence: The Arms Build-up in Cuba*
- Resources: *Image: Bay of Pigs*
 Map: Cuba
 Map: Range of Missile Strikes from Cuba
- Exercises: *Windows on Cuba*
 Connecting the Lines
- Access to clips from the film, *Thirteen Days*
 (either purchase or various clips available on You Tube)
- Procedures:

Setting the Stage

The 1960 election brought more than a new president to the White House, it also brought a new look—or a “New Frontier”—to American diplomacy. President John F. Kennedy and his chief advisors, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, wanted to move away from the “massive retaliation” doctrine of the Eisenhower era. JFK was interested in the space race and the Peace Corps; he wanted to chart his own Cold War course.

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Setting the Stage—Continued

But the New Frontier created its own crises in dealing with an old problem—the Caribbean island of Cuba. In January 1959, the forces of Fidel Castro overthrew the corrupt government of Fulgencio Batista. Many Cubans fled to the safety of the United States and immediately began to plot their return.

The CIA—remembering its earlier success in Guatemala—backed the rebels and, on April 17, 1961, they landed in Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. The invasion was a spectacular failure and Castro denounced the United States at the UN, arguing that the Americans had broken all of their treaty obligations.

Before the Bay of Pigs, no one knew for certain if Castro would be hostile to the United States. After the invasion there was no doubt. He looked for alliance and protection to the Soviet Union and agreed to host Soviet nuclear missile bases on Cuban territory, which would allow Soviet atomic weapons to hit the continental United States just minutes after launch.

Americans were shocked and horrified when they saw photos of the missile bases under construction. As ships carrying the missiles neared the United States blockade of Cuba, Americans were alert for a nuclear attack—and the start of World War III. For thirteen tense days while the world held its breath, diplomatic negotiations between Washington and Moscow unfolded. When the Soviets recalled the ships and the Americans made some minor concessions, the nuclear crisis was averted.

In this lesson, students will study these two events. Based on familial history and knowledge, they may have lots of interest and/or questions.

Pre-Lesson

- 1.** At the last class before the lesson, ask students as homework to find a map, sketch, or picture of the events at the Bay of Pigs or *La Batalla de Girón*, or *Playa Girón* as it was called in Cuba.
- 2.** Locate the film, *Thirteen Days*, and select a few key clips showing the missile crisis for use in class.

Day One

- 1.** Project the resource image, *The Bay of Pigs*, on a screen or wall in the classroom and ask students if they can tell where this is. (Most may think it's any southern beach.)
- 2.** Ask them what they have discovered about the Bay of Pigs incident and direct them to record that information on a sheet of paper.
- 3.** While they are writing down what they know, distribute the resource, *Connecting Lines*, and ask them to draw a line from the name to the matching image.

4. Discuss the correct answers and ask them to share information from their homework research, including any maps, sketches or pictures.
5. Ask for a volunteer or two to come “stand on the beach” (i.e., in front of the projected image) and explain the events related to the flotilla of vessels that arrived at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. If possible, they should also explain what happened to the operation’s air support. Ask for additional volunteers to also report.
6. Distribute the document, *The Lesson of Cuba*.
7. Ask the students to determine what Kennedy was telling the newspaper editors during his April 20th speech.
 - a. Why had he decided in the last 24 hours to talk about the recent events?
 - b. Why does he call this an “unhappy” island?
 - c. For what is Castro blaming United States?

Students can add their answers to their prior knowledge notes.

8. Discuss these questions as a class. (Cuba draws great student interest, especially in certain localities in the southern United States.) Students may want to also discuss when and why their relatives fled Cuba or whether or not relatives are still there.
9. After the discussion, begin the film, *Thirteen Days*, and show the pre-selected clips for the rest of the class period. Remind students that they have the *Connecting Lines* exercise to help them recognize the characters in the film.
10. For homework, ask them to find maps, sketches or images of anything related to the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. Suggest that they rent or download *Thirteen Days* and watch the rest of the movie on their own.

Day Two

1. Prior to student arrival, place on each desk the resource: *Map of Cuba*, and the document, *Unmistakable Evidence: the Arms build up in Cuba*.
2. Using information from the film and notes from the previous class, ask them to read this announcement from Kennedy to the nation and fill in the resource, *Windows on Cuba*. Each box has a term that is used in his speech so have students explain the connotations he uses to represent that term.
3. Once students have finished, ask them to get in groups of four and discuss the evidence that they put in each of the quadrants.

- 4.** Give them the map of Cuba and ask them to also discuss how far the missile range could be. Who do they know who would possibly be in the line of fire? Why did citizens go into shelters during the most intense part of the crisis? What maps, sketches, and/or pictures did they bring from homework? Share these in the groups.
- 5.** As the group discussions end, play the last few minutes of the movie that show how the crisis ended and the deal that Kennedy made with Khrushchev.
- 6.** Collect student's notes and homework as they leave.

Extension Activities:

- 1.** When volunteers go before "the beach" match them up in pairs:
 - a.** Kennedy and Khrushchev
 - b.** Khrushchev and Castro
 - c.** Stevenson and Castro
- 2.** Research the Bay of Pigs operation further through the official U.S. Government documentary history of the crisis found in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, which includes declassified documentation from the CIA. The entire volume on Cuba may be found at: <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v10>
- 3.** Invite a class speaker to discuss the current state of Cuba and why Americans are still not allowed to travel there freely.
- 4.** Have students study the Helms-Burton Bill, related to the U.S. embargo on Cuba. ■